

PMO Community of Practice November 2020 Meeting Summary

Header (Required)

Title: Fix the problem, not the blame
Brief description: Moving from a focus on blame when something goes wrong, to constructive action
Learning objectives: Learning how to bypass the blame game and focus on collaborative problem solving
PDU Amount 1 1 PDU
PDU Allocation 1 Leadership

Member Discussion Topic 11/10/2020: Fix the problem, not the blame

Blame can sometimes be hidden in process or root cause

- Some experiences
- When something goes wrong, show me the requirements and sign off
 - If not signed off, focus on process failure
 - Go to first – depends on business area
 - Sometimes address the problem – typically people engaged
 - Sometimes, who messed up – not understand what actually went done
- Organized people do less blaming, people who are less organized blame more
- Trace back – you can see that the person doing the blame often instigated the change, such as late changes without changing timeframe

Blame to PMs

- Consultant firms sometimes take the blame to please the client
 - Client blames PM, consultant firm switches out PM. Normally PM finds another spot
 - PM has a target on their back
- Agile approach reduced surprises, sets expectations, keeps them involved
 - Phase 2 helps, especially with juggling priorities, and fixed date (ex: events, year-end)

Blame within projects

- For a confluence of disparate issues – versus taking each issue and improving it
 - Projects that are over budget, often it is known in advance. Looking at “extras”, some are truly extra and some are missed
 - Fixing it is a team effort
- Strategize
 - Raise the flag forcefully
 - Do the best to look at what went wrong and how to fix, or even if it needs to be fixed. For example, flags to flip on/off features if they do not work – relieves last minute blame
 - Example, Peoplesoft, Info Cloud Suite
 - They push changes through – impacts all customers – some things can be reverted

- Usually on multitenant – same software
- Some allow looking back one or two releases – eventually forced
- Microservices plays well with this – scalable, can switch off a single component
- Grin and bear it – taking responsibility. Takes more time, but takes the person by surprise, more respect.

Blame and leadership

- Know your leaders and which ones look to blame people.
- Better VPs are looking for solutions, not pointing blame.
- Blame game VPs can be shown benefits, but habits are hard to change

Standard CYA, and the loss of time doing that

- When people get defensive, try to focus on facts. Try to keep people from feeling you are out to get them
- Also, do for yourself – focus on the facts and keep it neutral
- Be accountable
- Be able to tell people the status, it helps people feel comfortable
- Incident management – get customer operational; get process improvement to help for future

War stories

- Org acquired – one resented the other. There was a service change. An error was identified, but the CEO did not accept it, but demanded a fix right away – refused to acknowledge and used inappropriate language
 - Don't respond with anger
- Status sent to the group, and everyone is copied, but if something goes wrong, there is a scapegoat. Can be personal
 - Can't expect to read everything – why was I not told
 - Escalation to higher authority
 - Know how to speak to your audience
 - Communications approach, weekly standup / briefings with executives
 - Government – public was upset, so government blamed the contractor. Contractor accepted blame and was able to win other contracts
- Easier for CEO to have CIO release the engineer than explain to major client why they lost the service. After engineer was fired, the account manager went back to client, who remained a client
- Contractor mentioned a problem without informing. Solved with pre-meeting and spokesperson to represent the team

How to safely get out of the blame cycle and some pitfalls

- Get around the blame game – share knowledge or the risks in advance. Find errors up front, QA, UAT, etc.
- All status reports should identify risks or issues and mitigate / plan
- Communicate out to help desk – work closely with call center to keep track of issues
- Some issues are unforeseeable – root cause analysis and lessons learned to avoid repeating
- Pre-release review – 10 minutes: Client buy-in, backout plan

- Some effort to make processes better, improves culture

If you are too worried about doing things wrong, it is very hard to do things right

- Fear of doing the right thing
 - Need to deal with fear of making things better or suggest making things better because someone else will not like it, or have to do more work
- How to deal with bully? Need to stick to your guns
- People may be afraid to raise an issue if they are afraid

T. T. Ruwan Fonseca
Claudia Compagnoni Gibb
Zachary Lehmann
Marlo Moss
Ray Francis
Joanne Guerriero
David Morgen FS

Next Meeting

Next meeting is Tuesday, December 8, 2020

Participants: Claudia Compagnoni Gibb, David Morgen, Joanne Guerriero, Marlo Moss, Patricia Palmisciano, Raymond Francis, T. T. Ruwan Fonseka, Zachary Lehmann

Facilitator and Scribe: David Morgen